



What Is a Toll Free Number and How Does it Work?

Toll free numbers are numbers that begin with one of the following three-digit codes: 800, 888, 877, 866, 855 or 844. Toll free numbers allow callers to reach businesses and/or individuals without being charged for the call. The charge for using a toll free number is paid by the called party (the toll free subscriber) instead of the calling party. Toll free numbers can be dialed directly to your business or personal telephone line.

Toll free numbers are very common and have proven successful for businesses, particularly in the areas of customer service and telemarketing. Toll free service provides potential customers and others with a "free" and convenient way to contact businesses.

Toll free codes – 800, 888, 877, 866, 855, 844

Today, there are six toll free codes: 800, 888, 877, 866, 855 and 844. Although 800, 888, 877, 866, 855 and 844 are all toll free codes, they are not interchangeable. 1-800-234-5678 is not the same number as 1-888-234-5678. Calls to each toll free number are routed to a particular local telephone number.

How are toll free numbers assigned?

Toll free numbers are assigned on a first-come, first-served basis by entities referred to as "Responsible Organizations" or "RespOrgs." These entities, which may or may not be telephone companies, have access to the SMS/800 database, which contains information regarding the status of all toll free numbers. RespOrgs are certified by the SMS/800 database administrator, which manages toll free service.

Contact a RespOrg or other toll free service provider if you want to obtain a toll free number. These entities can access the database and reserve a number for subscribers. There are several hundred RespOrgs and toll free service providers in the United States. You can find a complete list on the SMS/800 website (<https://www.sms800.com>), or you may call the SMS/800 Help Desk at 1-888-SMS-3300.

What is the FCC's role?

The FCC regulates or sets the rules under which toll free numbers can be used or obtained. The FCC requires that toll free numbers be portable, meaning that a toll free number subscriber can "port" his or her number to a new provider when changing toll free number service providers. The FCC's rules designate the criteria for determining the status of each toll free number, and prohibit "warehousing" and "hoarding" of toll free numbers.

The FCC, however, is not involved in the day-to-day assignment of toll free numbers, does not have direct access to the toll free number database, and cannot provide any information about the status of a toll free number or a request for a toll free number. A telephone industry standards-setting organization has established some guidelines for toll free numbers, and those guidelines must comply with the FCC's requirements.

What is a “vanity” number and how can i get one?

A "vanity" number is a toll free telephone number that also spells a person's or company's name or spells a word or acronym that is chosen by the subscriber, such as 1-800-FLOWERS or 1-888-NEW-CARS. To find out whether a specific toll free number is available, contact any RespOrg.

“Warehousing/hoarding” toll free numbers

"Warehousing" by toll free service providers is prohibited by the FCC's rules. A toll free service provider may not legally reserve a toll free number without having an actual toll free subscriber for whom the number is being reserved. RespOrgs or toll free service providers who warehouse numbers are subject to penalties.

"Hoarding" by subscribers is similarly prohibited and illegal. A subscriber may not acquire more toll free numbers than the subscriber intends to use. Hoarding also includes "number brokering" – it is illegal for a subscriber to sell a toll free number for a fee.

Filing a complaint

If you have a problem with a company providing toll free numbers or service, first try to resolve it with that company or the company that bills you for the service. If you can't resolve it directly, you can file a complaint with the FCC. There is no charge for filing a complaint.

You have multiple options for filing complaints:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); ASL Videophone: 1-844-432-2275
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

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